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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.82>



DR.B.R. AMBEDKAR'S IDEAS ON EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar was truly a man of social justice who believes in equality and humanity. He was a social reformer, political thinker, parliamentarian and constitutionalist who played a very important and constructive role in shaping the India. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar believed that, State can play important role in economic development of people. He recognized the need for a threefold strategy- Provision of equal right, Provision of legal safeguards and Pro-active measures against discrimination. He eliminates discrimination from constitution as a result citizens cannot be denied justice on the basis of economic or other disabilities. In this paper it is an attempt to draw an outline of Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of education and social change. Present education system in India has different aims and objectives in regard to our needs and these are incompetent for individual and social growth. Education should play a role in man's individual and social life both. Dr.Ambedkar's philosophy enlightens as with clear understanding of nature of society and its important components. To understand its philosophy of education one should know about his philosophy of social change. It is our need to understand the philosophy and its implications to every aspect of our lives.

Keywords: Ambedkar's Ideas, Theory of Social Change, Indian Education System, Modern India, Agency of Change, Intellectual Property Rights.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

"We must stand on our own feet and fight as best as we can for our rights. So, carry on your agitation and organize your forces. Power and prestige will come to you through struggle".

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

Education is the most important competent of any developed society. In the words of former President of India Dr.A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, it is the most important elements for the growth and prosperity of a nation. It enables as to understand the milestones of the modern society achieved and links common people with the scientific achievements and technological break-through made by our scientists. You these are 350 million illiterates in India even now besides a large number of such literates, "who have to acquire employable skills to suit the emerging modern India and the globe.

The present education system is divorced from the real social content and goals. We as the citizens of the republic are constitutionally committed to democracy, social justice equality of opportunity, secularism and above all to a welfare state. Educational policy and educational programmes should not merely equip an individual to adjust with society Every educational institute from secondary school to University College should be developed to become an agency of change, it is the dream of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar. He was a revolutionary, rationalist-humanist, human rights intellectual-activist, a man who looked ahead of his time. His philosophy of education aims at creation of a liberating consciousness, which is not just formal education, but the conscientisation process of education, agitation and organization, put together. Education enriches the intellectual powers of the learns and to promote a respect for reason. It is not enough to know the answers to the question asked. it is equally important to learn to question. A critical, systematically inquiring mind is the end result of 'proper intellectual training".

It is natural to ask the question "Reform and change to achieve what?" What type of society we aim at and what type of citizens we wish to produce? Ambedkar answered these questions. He says, "Knowledge is the foundation of a man's life and man is nothing without society. He gave the conception of an ideal society as "My ideal would be a society based on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society, there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words, there must be social endosmosis."

Life and Mission

Ambedkar is one of the most illustrious sons of India. He did yeoman services for the uplift of Dalits by carrying out a life long struggle to safeguard their rights to lead a life of dignity. His mission aimed at bringing about a radical transformation in the living conditions of millions of Dalits performing the most menial tasks such as carrying the night soil on their head, skinning carcasses, removing the dead cattle, grave digging and graveyard keeping, etc. he also fought for the Dalits protection from the



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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.82>



atrocities of upper castes. His name shines like a pole star in the annals of Dalit history. Therefore, the decision of the National Front Government to bestow on him the coveted award of Bharat Ratna is in fact, an honour to Ambedkar's vital contributions to the Dalits and also to the Indians as a whole. Ambedkar was such a person who had emerged out of the submerged sections of Indian society. Born in the lowest rung of Hindu caste hierarchy, he rose to Himalayan heights. Having suffered neglect and isolation in his early school life due to the curse of Untouchability, through sheer merit, determination and by dint of hard work, he overcame these handicaps and achieved the highest distinction in the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the world.

Dalit', first used in journalistic writings as far back as 1931 to connote the untouchables, did not gain currency until the early 1970s with the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra. As it is now used, it implies a condition of being under privileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on account of their lowly birth. The untouchables were the lowest in the Hindu system but had numerous subdivisions and graded inequalities. Ambedkar thought his life strived to emancipate the untouchables by the way of integrating the socialism with democracy, and legally demolishing the inhuman practice of untouchability that had religious sanction of thousands of years. Ambedkar prepared the modern constitutions based on the principle of equality for all human beings, thus laying the foundations of democratic values after two and half thousands of years in India- The life of such a unique personality like Ambedkar, in this context may reveal a few telling events of Ambedkar's life. The social milieu, shot with iniquities suffered by the community into which he was born, is a setting which throws light on the story of Babasaheb Ambedkar and the crushing realism, which ignited his incendiary radicalism.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born at Mhow in Central India on 14 April 1891. His father Ramji Sakpal and grandfather Maloji Sakpal had rendered military service to the British. He rose to the rank of subedar-major and was a head instructor in a military school for about fourteen years. After retirement in 1891, on a pension of Rs. 50 per month, he settled in Dapoli in the Ratnagiri District in 1894, he was reemployed as a store-keeper in the public works Department, Ratnagiri, and was later transferred to Satara. Ramji Sakpal had fourteen children: Bhimrao was the youngest. Bhimabai, Bhimrao's mother died in 1896, when he was only five. His aunt, Mirabai, loved him very much and she ably filled the gap and took care of him. She used to call him Bhimrao. Ramji Sakpal was a teetotaler and never touched meat. He had keen interest in religious and theological discussions. He was an admirer of Phuley. There were three schools of Bhakti prevalent among untouchables, especially Mahars. They were Kabir, Ramanand and Nath. In 1896, Ramji Ambedkar became the follower of Kabir. This Bhakti school of thought found consolation in compassion, benevolence and resignation to god. The devotees sought and found moral satisfaction and spiritual solace in Lord Krishna and Shrirama. Kabir condemned the caste system and hence the untouchables who suffered untold miseries on account of the caste system turned to the Kabir cult.

When Bhimrao was five, he was sent to a Marathi school in Dapoli. When his father came to Satara, Bhimrao entered the Government High School, Satara, in 1900 in the first standard. His name in the school was Bhima Ramji Ambavadekar. The original surname of his family was Sakpal. But his ancestors preferred to call themselves after their ancestral village Ambavade which is in Khed taluka in Ratnagiri district. One teacher named Ambedkar in the Satara High School loved Bhimrao very much and often fed him. He was obliging and kind. As a mark of love and respect to this teacher, Bhimrao began to call himself Ambedkar and, throughout his life, remained grateful to this teacher who treated him so kindly during his school days. When Ambedkar went to the Round Table Conferences, this teacher had sent him a congratulatory letter. Being an untouchable by birth, Ambedkar was forced to sit aside in the school. He could not mix with other boys or play cricket and other games with them. The untouchables were prohibited to learn Sanskrit. The Sanskrit teacher was adamant and did not teach Sanskrit to the untouchables. Ambedkar was forced to take Persian as the second language in the high school. He said, "Though I had the eager desire to learn Sanskrit, I was forced to leave it on account of the narrow attitude of our teachers". The teacher never touched the notebooks of the untouchable students. Some of them did not even ask them to recite poems nor put any questions to them for fear of being polluted. Ambedkar had to face humiliation.

Maharaja Sayajirao called him on 4 June 1913. An agreement to serve in Baroda state was signed and in the third week of July 1913, he joined Columbia University in New York, USA as a Gaikwad scholar and was the very first Mahar to undertake foreign studies. In Columbia, he stayed in a cosmopolitan club. He could move there with a status of equality. Life in the Columbia University was a revelation to him, and it enlarged his mental vision. Professor Seligman, the well-known economist, was his teacher. Ambedkar was studious. He used to study 18 hours a day Lala Lajpat Rai, the great national leader, was exiled in America that time. He used to go daily to the college library. Ambedkar attracted his attention and Lalaji enquired cordially about this untouchable youth. They talked about the national emancipation struggle which was going on in India.

In June 1915, Ambedkar obtained his M.A. degree for his thesis, "Ancient Indian Commerce". In June 1916, he read a paper on "The Castes in India, Their mechanism, genesis and development" in the Anthropology seminar of Dr. Goldenweiser. It was published in the Indian Antiquary in May 1917. It was also republished in the form of a brochure, the first published work of Ambedkar. Therein he observed that endogamy is the essence of castes. According to him, a caste is an enclosed class and it existed



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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.82>



before Manu whom he described as an audacious person and a dare-devil. In June 1916, Ambedkar submitted his thesis for the degree of Ph.D., entitled "National Dividend for India: A Historical and Analytical Study". It was published eight years afterwards under the title: The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India. The book was dedicated to Maharaja Sayajirao and had an introduction by Professor S.A. Seligman. "The book proved very useful to the members of the Indian Legislature at the time of the Budget Discussion. Ambedkar left Columbia University to join the London School of Economics and Political science as a graduate student in October 1916. Professor Seligman gave him introductory letters to professor Cannan and Sydney Webb. In October 1916 he got admitted to the Gray's Inn for law. But he had to face a crisis. He returned to India after spending a year in London working on a thesis for the M.Sc (Econ.) degree. His return before completion of the work was necessitated by the termination of the scholarship granted to him by Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda. Ambedkar tried to persuade him to continue the scholarship, but could not succeed. He obtained permission of the London University through the recommendation of Prof. Cannan to resume his studies within a period not exceeding four years from October 1917.

Ambedkar saved some money during his professorship in Sydenham College in Bombay. He got some help from the Sahu Maharaja of Kolhapur and took loan of Rs. 5000/- from his friend Mr. Naval Bathena and left for London, in July, 1920 to complete his study in law and economics. There he started his studies afresh. He joined several libraries like, the London Museum Library, Goldsmith's Library of Economic literature, the London University, General Library and the Indian Office Library. He used to sit in those libraries throughout the day without break for lunch to save both money and time. He was the last man to leave the library every day with his pockets bulging with notes, his face pale, tired and slimy. The second round of study used to start at night. He would go on till early morning. His friend and roommate Asnodkar used to request him to rest for some time, but Ambedkar rejected it softly because his aim to finish his studies soon was before him. Though he was busy in his studies, he never forgets his real aim of removing his community problems. He had met Montagu, the Secretary of State for India in British Parliament and Mr. Vital Bhai Patel who happened to be in London and had talks with them in respect of the grievances of depressed classes in India. He also had contacts with his friends and leaders of depressed classes in India. He used to guide them through letters in the matters of movements. In June, 1921, the University of London accepted his thesis on 'Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance in British India for the M.Sc. Degree. In October, 1922, he completed his famous thesis, 'The Problems of Rupee' and submitted to the University of London. About the same time, he was invited by the Bar for which he could not take his Bar examinations earlier as he was in his studies, beyond this law books were not available to him. After submitting the second thesis Ambedkar left for Germany for the study in Bonn University.

He was there for three months and in March, 1923 he was called back to London by his professor Edwin Cannon and asked to rewrite the thesis 'The Problem of Rupee', without changing his conclusions. By his writings and speeches, he was suspected by the Britishers as a revolutionary. Prof. Herald J. Lasky who was teaching in London University also felt that the ideas expressed in his paper were revolutionary in nature. Ambedkar could not extend his stay in London to rewrite the thesis due to lack of money. Whatever he saved was spent on books. His family in India was helpless. So, he returned India in April 1923. After some days he submitted thesis on the 'problem of Rupee' from Bombay. The same work was published as a book by Miss P.S. King and Company Ltd., London in December, 1923. He dedicated the great work to the memory of his father and mother and Ambedkar began his career as Lawyer and gradually his practice was picked up.

Builder of Modern India

Modern education in India is often criticized for being based on rote learning rather than problem solving. But this is not the conception of Ambedkar. In his own views, it is an instrument to change in the destiny. As he said "Give up the ideas that parents give 'Janma' to child and not destiny (Karma). They can mould the destiny of their child by giving them education." But he knows that it is difficult to enforce education, due to economic disparity and social conditions, for the major part of India including women and Dalits, a term referred to by D.R. Ambedkar, which means "oppressed". To reduce this economic disparity and social conditions, he fought for his whole life. Due to his efforts after India's independence a number of rules were formulated for the backward Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and for women. He said that, "Education is as necessary for females as it is for males." But this is the reality that women have much lower literacy rate compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools, and many of them dropout. According to a 1998 report by U.S. Department of Commerce, the chief barrier to female education in India are inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities), shortage of female teachers and gender bias in curriculum (majority of the female characters being depicted as weak and helpless).

Due to lack of political will, pupil teacher ratio, shortage of infrastructure and poor level of teacher training are responsible for the incomplete development of women. The mother of literate women among the female population of India was 2-6% from the British Raj onwards to the formation of the Republic of India in 1947. Concentrated efforts led to improvement from 15.3% in 1961 to 28.5% in 1981. Since 2001 the literacy for women has exceeded 50% of the overall female population, though these statistics were still very low compared to world standards and even male literacy within India. In our so-called holy culture, we can find lots of



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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.82>



beautiful ideas on women status, but we can't find any practical implications, about it and found them full of miseries. Ambedkar said, "Man's misery is the result of man's inequity and resultants misery." He fought against the traditional mythological and cruel ideology of ancient India and says, "Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Both will other wither and die." So, he dedicate, his life to implement his ideas, what he got through critical and reflective thinking about India's real socio-political and economic conditions.

We can find in Ambedkar's life the qualities of a good student as well as a teacher. After graduating from Bombay University, he received M.A., and Ph.D. degree from the prestigious American University of Columbia and M.Sc. & D.Sc. degrees from the reputed British University of London. Besides he obtained But-at-Law degree from the famous Gray's Inn in England. His training under distinguished scholars like John Dewey. Charles Beard and R.A. Seligman helped in sharpening his intellect and in developing his analytical power. Although, he had specialised in economics and law, he also studied history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, religion and political science to develop and interdisciplinary perspective for a proper understanding and analysis of the depressed people of India. His deep and critical analysis, we can find in his vast writings on all issues related to depressed class and Indian social problems. In the words of a thinker, "Dr.Ambedkar strongly condemned the caste system because it is based on hierarchy not equality, lack of social efficiency instead of social efficiency, social immobility and opposition to social mobility destructive tendencies rather than harmony, ex-communication instead of union, endogamy and not on exogamy and on anti-social spirit. He also condemned caste system because it prevented assimilation and promoted regression. It not only created differences among the Hindus but also made them inactive, proved to be a barrier to in the way of land reforms, and promoted social backwardness and has done grave injustice to the lower caste.

Struggle for Education and on Social Problems

Ambedkar prepared himself to launch his social movement for the upliftment of the untouchables. He convened a meeting on March, 1924 at Damodar hall, Bombay to consider the desirability of establishment of a central institution for removing difficulties of untouchables and placing their grievances before the Government after a long discussion and deliberation with well-wisher founded an Institution on July, 1924, 'BahiskritHitakarini Sabha'. The aims and objectives of the Sabha were:

1. To promote the education among the depressed classes by mean of residential schools and other necessary steps opening hostels.
2. To promote the spread of culture among the depressed classes by opening libraries, social centers and study circles.
3. To advance and improve the economic condition of the depressed classes starting industrial and agricultural.
4. To represent the grievances of the depressed classes.

The President of the Sabha was Sir Chimanlal Harilal Setalwad, LL.D. and the Chairman of the Managing Committee was Ambedkar. Its secretary was S.N. Shivtarkar and Treasurer N.T. Jadav. The Central Organization of the Sabha devoted itself to uplift the untouchables from the poor conditions to a status of socio-politico equality along with other communities and to promote their economic conditions.

There were many institutions and organizations worked earlier than Ambedkar to solve the social problems of untouchability. Some of them were aimed at reform the society. But Ambedkar made distinction between the social reforms in the sense of the above Hindu reformers in his opinion, which was to re-organise and re-construct the Hindu society. The Hindu social reforms were related to remarriage of widows, right to property and education for women, child marriages and other matters while the latter type related to the abolition of caste system and reconstruction of Hindu Society on the basis of equality. Hindu Mahasabha one of the social institutions appealed to Hindus to open temples for all people. But their efforts failed because Sabha leaders themselves protested against the resolution.

BahiskritHitkarini Sabha worked hard and opened many schools and hostels for depressed Class people and supplied clothes, books, and stationary. The Sabha collected funds from Sholapur Municipality and from other people. It also started a magazine called 'Saraswathi Vilas', opened many libraries and sports clubs. It spread the concept of self-respect in the minds of depressed classes. These people were now understood their grievances and thinking about their liberation.

Ambedkar was nominated to the Bombay legislative council by the Governor of Bombay in 1927. In the same year Mahad Tank Satyagraha was organized by him at Mahad conference of untouchables on March, 1927 he organ stressed the necessity of rooting out the ideas of haves and have not and caste discrimination inculcating self-elevation through self-respect and self-knowledge. After the meeting all the delegates marched to the Chowdar Tank, achieved their right to drink and take water. It created a greater violence and Ambedkar was forced to take shelter in a police station. He encouraged the women of depressed classes to contribute their part in the progress of their children and also advised them to dress neatly as Hindu women. A resolution was passed



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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.82>



by the BahiskritHitakarini Sabha to burn the Manusmriti which created inequalities among the Hindu people and slavery to untouchables. On 25 December, 1927 was a red-letter day in the annals of India, on that day Ambedkar burnt the Smriti and urged for new one to reshape the Hindu social order on March, 1928 Ambedkar introduced a Bill in the Bombay legislative council to amend the Bombay hereditary offices Act of 1874, which made the Mahars to lose their self-respect and tied them to the small jobs. He provided more security to the "Watandars" (land Holders), better security for payment of remuneration of Watandars. But the Bill was disapproved by the select committee and Ambedkar had withdrawn the Bill in 1929.

What need to be done for social change?

The real worth of education is to keep oneself abreast with the deeper aspects of human life. Human knowledge and experiences are, therefore, always in need of crystallisation and recrystallisation. Such processes are continuous and unending, and as such, as inherent philosophy of education instills a deeper faith in humanity – a faith that reconnotes man from merely being a human being. “In the words of Dr.Ambedkar, “A great man must be motivated by the dynamics of a social purpose and motivated by the dynamics of a social purpose must act as the scourge and scavengers of the society.” In his thinking man’s power is-depend upon (i) physical heredity. (ii) social inheritance or endowments in the form of parental care, education, accumulation of scientific knowledge, everything, that enables him to be more efficient than the savage and finally. (iii) On his own efforts. He said that, “One should always cherish some ambition to do something in the word. They alone rise who strive.”

With the same tone Tagore allows ample freedom for pupils in education not because they lead in undisciplined life but essentially, because they will learn discipline by themselves. He said, “Our life gains what is called ‘value’ in those of its aspects which represent eternal humanity in knowledge, in sympathy, in deeds, in character and creative works. And from the beginning of our history we are seeking, often at the cost of everything else, the value of our life and not merely success. In other words, we are trying to realize in ourselves the immortal man so that we may die but not perish. This is the meaning of the utterance in the Upanishad. “I am vedyam puusham veda, yatha ma vo mryum parivyathaha”..... Realize the person so that thou mayst not suffer from death.”?

It is our suggestion that the aims and objectives of education should include individual as well as social aims, with emphasis of social transformation are constructing society to make it modernized, productive, participative, value oriented and nation committed to its constitutional obligation. With efforts of Dr.Ambedkar India get a constitution which incorporated the principles of liberty, equality and justice. In the constitution he provides for one man one vote (universal adult franchise), a common All India Civil Service to man the important posts, independent judiciary, free and compulsory education to the children upto 14 years of age etc. The heart of the constitution, is the fundamental rights guaranteed to every citizen and Directive Principles to the executive and legislature for the governance of the country. Dr. Ambedkar, the chief architect of our constitution, also included secularism and economic democracy in the constitutional scheme so as to transfer the stagnant Indian society into an egalitarian and vibrant social order.

Summing Up and concluding remarks

Dr. Ambedkar wanted to create in which all have equal civil rights. He worked as eradicator of evils from society but he couldn’t succeed fully. He wanted to establish a corruption free society in which all are equal. So, we have to finish this work. He wanted to secularize politics and wanted to protect politics from narrow mindedness, theology and traditionalism. His inspirational tone always made the young people of India to realize the true nature of humanity. This is the right time when we have to recall and remember the philosophy, ideals and principles of Dr.Ambedkar for the betterment and enlightenment of our country and establishment of world-peace. Dr.Ambedkar’s philosophy of life enriched with the feelings of social justice and peace. He dedicated his whole life to secure social justice and equal status for all. People in general and the youth in particular should follow Ambedkar’s philosophy as a teacher, social reformer, political thinker and above all an educationist. Youth will contribute their share whole heartedly in building the nation fraternity, justice and should understand his philosophy as a whole. We sums up our discussion by the great saying of Dr.Ambedkar. “Man is mortal, everyone is to die some day or other. But one must resolve to lay down one’s life in enriching the noble ideas of self-respect and in better human life.”

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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.82>



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

ISSN:2277-7881; IMPACT FACTOR :7.816(2021); IC VALUE:5.16; ISI VALUE:2.286

Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal: VOLUME:10, ISSUE:6(5), June:2021

Online Copy of Article Publication Available: www.ijmer.in

Digital certificate of publication:<http://ijmer.in/pdf/e-Certificate%20of%20Publication-IJMER.pdf>

Scopus Review ID: A2B96D3ACF3FEA2A

Article Received: 10th June - Publication Date:30th June 2021

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Last Saved By: Windows User
Total Editing Time: 17 Minutes
Last Printed On: 7/1/2021 11:04:00 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 6
Number of Words: 4,507 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 25,695 (approx.)